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THE NOVEL OF TOMORROW

AND THE SCOPE OF FICTION

SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS
MARY AUSTIN
JAMES BRANCH CABELL
FLOYD DELL
WALDO FRANK
ZONA GALE
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THE NOVEL OF TOMORROW
AND
THE SCOPE OF FICTION

THE NOVEL OF TOMORROW

AND THE SCOPE OF FICTION

By TWELVE AMERICAN NOVELISTS

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NOTE

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THE EDITORS, *The New Republic.*

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APOLLYON VS. POLLYANNA

by

SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

THE NOVEL OF TOMORROW

I

APOLLYON VS. POLLYANNA

THE scope of fiction? Why "scope"? The word implies breadth of choice and treatment, and that in an art already dangerously subversive of the present age's vitalizing principle of conduct, benevolent censorship. That way peril lies.

Let us endeavor to approach this subject from the view-point of that admirable organization, so representative of our best and most decorous minds, the League for the Promotion of Prudery. As the League points out

in its introductory enunciation of principles, the error and sin of modernist literature is that it tends to portray life as it is. All respectable persons realize that life in many of its phases is wholly unfit for the consideration of the pure. Take, for example, the regrettable matter of birth and all that precedes it. If our novelists, playwrights and publicists would unanimously agree to refrain from any mention of natal or pre-natal processes, is it too much to hope that we could presently raise up a generation which should retain its unsullied mental innocency until, let us say, the legal age of twenty-one, or even conceivably later? Leave these undesirable matters to the biologists. Nobody reads biology anyway.

It is gratifying to note that the great and virtuous commonwealth of Pennsylvania has already initiated the good work by barring from its motion picture theaters any indication of how population is maintained. A young

couple, though they be pasted over with marriage certificates thick as hotel labels on a bargain-sale trunk, may not be shown in the provocative act of purchasing a perambulator for a prospective baby. Even that gallinaceous makeshift, the stork, is banished from the screen. Ohio is not far behind. A publisher who ventured to invade its unsullied borders with an edition of Rabelais has been apprehended. In this propitious soil the League for the Promotion of Prudery is quietly working to have the Bible expurgated and the Talmud revised. Shakespeare must go.

Eventually as public support accrues to the League and after it has cleansed and disinfected fiction, poetry and the drama, it purposes to direct its attention to art and journalism.

It must not be inferred that all imaginative creation, per se, is interdicted. Writers may still hold the mirror up to nature, provided nature

is suitably clad. Modern fashions are regarded as impermissible.

While the growing strength of censorship is a profound satisfaction and encouragement to the truly upright, it is evident that this method can never go far enough. A complete Index Expurgatorius is the eventual aim, or better still, an Index Prohibitus. Thus far there has been devised only a broadly modeled White List herewith presented for consideration. Stories, plays and poems are to be regarded as allowable in the following classes:

(a) Political and business stories wherein honesty triumphs.

(b) Sunday-school stories.

(c) Children and farm stories.

(d) Love stories; object, matrimony.

(e) Nature stories, though it must be remembered that some animals are coarse in their habits.

It is the League's plan to license only such authors as subscribe to the

restrictions above. Others will be forbidden publication. Can any genuinely artistic heart fail to thrill at the prospect of a brighter, cleaner, purer world, wherein all the books will be of the school of Harold Bell Wright or Gene Stratton-Porter; wherein Apollyon and all his legions of darkness will flee before Pollyanna with her forces of sweetness and light?

THE AMERICAN FORM OF THE NOVEL

by

Mary Austin

II

THE AMERICAN FORM OF THE NOVEL

THE novel has always concerned itself with such incidents of the life performance as have been found significant by the age in which they occur. Its scope has been combat when combat was the major occupation of men. As the necessity of social adjustment operated over the lust of conquest the long story reflected and illustrated the process of such adjustment. When complete stratification had taken place in European society, the story-telling emphasis shifted to the set of circumstances by which the hero was introduced into the social strata in which he was henceforth to function. Thus, where the Greek long story was content to deal with the adventure of arms, the medieval ro-

mance made a feat of arms the means, subordinate to the event, of the hero's admission into high society, slaying the enemy as a prelude to marrying the king's daughter and sharing the kingdom.

When, however, the goal of man's serious endeavor became, as it did in the last century, some sort of successful escape from social certitude, the scope of the novel was extended to include the whole ground of his struggle and its various objectives. Then came America and brought a state of things in which uncertainty multiplied as to what the objective of man's secret and incessant search should be. Except in a limited, personal sense we have never known in the United States just which of us is villain and which hero. In addition to the decay of recognized social categories, our novelists find themselves under the necessity of working out their story patterns on a set of shifting backgrounds no two of which are entirely conformable. I

myself, and I suspect my experience to be typical, have had to learn three backgrounds, as distinct, except for the language spoken, as Paris, Gopher Prairie and the Scottish Highlands. While I do not complain to the gods of these things, I maintain that it gives me a disadvantage compared to Mr. Galsworthy, say, who, however rotten he finds the warp of English society to be, still finds it regularly spaced and competent to sustain the design of any story he may elect to weave.

There can be, of course, as many arrangements of the items of individual experience as there are ways in which experience can widely happen. But these are not so many as might be supposed. Varieties of personal adventure are more or less pulled together by the social frame in which they occur. One of the recognized criterions of veracity in a novel is the question, could, or couldn't, the main incident have occurred in that fashion in a given type of society. But

such a question can only be asked by people who have acquired the capacity to feel truth in respect to their own environment. It can never be asked by people for whom appreciations of social pattern, as it affects the literary expression of experience, have been stereotyped to the warp of relationships which are no longer admitted as social determinants. To readers whose souls are only at home in states of feudal dominance or dependence there is no truth whatever in modern realism.

The novel, more than any other written thing, is an attempt to persuade, at its best to compel, men to give over for a moment the pursuit of the distant goal, and savor the color, the intensity and solidarity of experience *while it is passing.* It is of no particular moment which one of the currents of experience that loop and whirl and cascade and backwater through the stream of human existence, is selected. It is important,

however, that it be presented in the idiom, that is to say, in the life pattern, of the audience for whom it is intended.

For every novel that the reviewer elects for critical attention, he discards a dozen others of possibly equal workmanship, for no reason but that they deal with patterns that have ceased to have—or perhaps never did have—constructive relation to the society in which we live. Or, in cases where high veracity and perfection of form compel his admiration, as in *The Age of Innocence,* he makes his point out of the very failure of validity in the background, itself a fragment of an earlier, outworn social fabric. Below the limit of a possible claim on his attention, every reviewer is also aware of scores of novels, eyeless and amorphic, kept moving on the submerged social levels by the thousands of readers who never come any nearer the surface of the present than perhaps to be occasionally chilled by it.

Aside from questions of form, is not the difference between novels which compel our attention and those we lightly discard, just this validity of relation between social warp and individual pattern? What I mean by pattern is the arrangement of story elements in true relations to the social structure by which they are displayed.

It is not necessary that the supporting structure of society appear as subject matter, but a certain clear sense of it in the writer's mind.

It is hardly possible yet in America to produce so smooth an over-woven piece as *Mr. Waddington of Wyck,* with the technique of one of those detached motifs of Chinese embroidery, in which, though everywhere to be traced, not one thread of the sustaining fabric is visible. Miss Sinclair works under the conviction that the social structure ought never to be treated by the novelist as part of his undertaking, but that, I suspect, is due to her never having worked on the

disconcertingly spaced and frequently sleazy background of American society. What we have to look for here is the ability, on the part of the writer, to fix upon the prophetic trend of happenings. Such a novel as *Main Street* should sustain itself a long time as a record of our discovery of the Community as villain, or, if you feel as some of us do toward its leading lady, as hero.

It is this necessity, forced upon us by recent social developments, of finding new, because as yet undeclared, points of balance in the arrangements of the American elements of story design, that has given rise to the notion that in America the novel need not concern itself with form primarily. But this can hardly be the case if we are to think of novel writing as an art, subject to the condition of survival in time.

Form is the shape a story acquires in its passage from the mind of the author to his audience. That all

minds are much alike gives to all fiction a recognized quality of form which differentiates what goes by the name of literature from mere reading matter. The minds of any audience living under fairly homogeneous influence acquire a characteristic receptivity, a peculiarly native manner of turning and tasting their experience before assimilating it, which is bound to be reflected in the shape of the vehicle in which experience is recorded and passed about. The American short story form developed out of our national method of attack on the immediate issue with attention undivided by any concern for the sequence of events. It was, in fact, the lack of sequence in our experience which made the short story for a long time our most expressive literary vehicle.

In this sense form in connection with novel writing becomes a matter of the span of perceptive consciousness of the selected audience. This gives, in our inchoate American life,

the greatest latitude of incident, but confines the novelist rather strictly to a democratic structure. It deprives him of fixed goals of social or financial or political achievement as terminal points, since none of these things has any permanence in the American scheme of things. The utmost the American novelist can hope for, if he hopes at all to see his work included in the literature of his time, is that it may eventually be found to lie along in the direction of the growing tip of collective consciousness.

Preeminently the novelist's gift is that of access to the collective mind. But there is a curious secret relation between the novelist's point of access and his grasp of form—and by form I mean all that is usually included in style, plus whatever has to do with the sense of something transacting between the book and its reader. Whoever lays hold on the collective mind at the node from which issues the green bough of constructive change,

finds himself impelled toward what is later discovered to be the prophetic form. What, after all, is the slow growth of appreciation of a novelist of the first rank, but the simultaneous widening of our social consciousness to a sense of its own direction?

American novelists are often accused of a failure of form. But is this anything more than an admission of failure of access on the part of the critics? Characteristic art form is seldom perfected until the culture of which it is an expression comes to rest. Of all the factors influencing the American novel form, I should expect the necessity, inherent in a democratic society, of conforming more directly, at any given moment, to the *state* of the collective consciousness rather than to its *direction*, to be the determining item. This is what, generally speaking, conditions the indispensable quality of access. Under the democratic condition it can be achieved only by participation. There is no

place in the American consciousness for the superior being standing about with his hands in his pockets, "passing remarks."

The democratic novelist must be inside his novel rather than outside in the Victorian fashion of Thackeray or the reforming fashion of Mr. Wells. He may, like Mr. Sherwood Anderson, be so completely inside as to be unclear in his conclusion about the goal, but there he is, Americanly, on his way. The reference of personal conduct to an overhead Judgment which forced the earlier novelist to assume the god in the disposition of his characters, has here given place to a true democratic desire of man to see himself as he is seen by the people with whom he does business. His search is not so much for judgment as for revelation, quick, nervous appreciations of place, relationship and solidarity. But in every case the validity of the American form will rest upon that intuitive access to the collective con-

sciousness, which it is the dream, and probably the mission of democracy to achieve.

A NOTE ON ALCOVES

by

James Branch Cabell

III

A NOTE ON ALCOVES

It is surprising what protean gifts a theme develops once you attempt to grapple with it. When I was asked to set down on paper my personal notions as to The Form and Scope of the Novel, the affair seemed simple. But, with the task actually begun, the typewriter bell may hardly tinkle thrice before one sees that the guide to further composition must be the once celebrated chapter, in I forget whose Natural History, upon the snakes of Iceland. It read, as you recall, "There are no snakes in Iceland." For one perceives that the form and scope of the novel, if not similarly non-existent, at least stay indeterminable in lands wherein the form and the scope of prose fiction stay limitless.

The sole aim of the written, printed and formally labeled novel is, I take

it, to divert. Such is (one may assume with in any event quite reputable backing) the only aim of creative writing, and of all the arts. But much the same sort of diversion seems to be the purpose of a staggering number of human endeavors: and it is when one considers the novels which are not formally labeled, that the theme evasively assumes all manner of shapes, and the field of prose fiction is revealed as limitless.

I do not hunt paradox. I but wish in real sincerity to acknowledge that our trade of novel writing and publishing is an ineffably minor evincement of the vast and pride-evoking truth, that human beings are wiser than reason. Pure reason—I mean, as pure as human reason assays—reveals out of hand that the main course of daily living is part boredom, part active discomfort and fret, and, for the not inconsiderable rest, a blundering adherence to some standard derived from this or that hearsay. But

human beings, in this one abnegation infinitely wise, here all discard the use of their reasoning powers, which are perhaps felt here to be at least as gullible as usual: and brave men cheerily deny their immersion in the futile muddle through which they toil lip-deep. Pinned to the wall, the more truthful of flesh and blood may grant that this current afternoon does, by the merest coincidence, prove answerable to some such morbid and over-colored description by people bent on being "queer": but in the admitter's mind forgetfulness is already about its charitable censorship of the events of the morning, to the intent that this amended account be placed on file with many expurgated editions of yesterday and the most brilliant romances about tomorrow. For human memory and human optimism are adepts at the prevarications which everybody grasps, retails and tirelessly reiterates; these two it is who coin the fictions which every person

weaves into the interminable extravaganza that he recites to himself as an accurate summing up of his own past and future; and everywhere about this earth's revolving surface moves a circulating library of unwritten novels bound in flesh and haberdashery.

Now the wholesome effect of these novels is patent. It is thanks to this brace of indefatigable romancers that nobody really needs to notice how the most of us, in unimportant fact, approach toward death through gray and monotonous corridors. Besides, one finds a number of colorful alcoves here and there, to be opened by intoxication or venery, by surrender to the invigorating lunacy of herd action, or even by mental concentration upon new dance-steps and the problems of auction bridge. One blunders, indeed, into a rather handsome number of such alcoves which, when entered, temporarily shut out the rigidity and the only exit of the inescapable cor-

ridor. And in addition, as we go, all sorts of merry tales are being interchanged about what lies beyond the nearing door and the undertaker's little black bag.

These are not, though, the only anesthetics. The human maker of fiction furnishes yet other alcoves, whether with beautiful or shocking ideas, with many fancy-clutching toys that may divert the traveler's mind from dwelling on the tedium of his journey and the ambiguity of its end. I have not yet, of course, come to consideration of the formally labeled novel, for this much is true of every form of man-made fiction, whether it be concocted by poets or statesmen, by bishops in conclave or by advertisers in the back of magazines. And since memory and optimism, as has been said, are the archetypal Homer and St. John, the supreme and most altruistic of all deceivers, the omnipotent and undying masters of omnipresent fictive creation, their "meth-

ods" are in the main pursued by the great pair's epigoni; who likewise tend to deal with the large deeds of superhuman persons seen through a glow of amber lucency, not wholly unakin to that of maple syrup.

Of the romances which make for business prosperity and religious revivals and wars to end war forever, here is no call to speak. Nor need I here point out that well-nigh every one who anywhere writes prose today, whether it takes the form of a tax return, or a magazine story, or a letter beginning "My dear So-and-So," is consciously composing fiction: and in the spoken prose of schoolrooms and courts of law and social converse, I think, no candid person will deny that expediency and invention collaborate. It may be true that lies have short legs, but civilization advances upon them.

So do we all exist, as if in a warm grateful bath, submerged and soothed by fiction. In contrast to the inhabi-

tants of the Scilly Islands, who are reputed to have lived by taking in one another's washing, so do we live by interchanging tales that will not wash. There seems to be no bound, no frontier trading-post, appointed anywhere to this barter of current fiction, not in the future nor in the years behind. Men have been, almost cynically, shown with what ease the romance which we call history may be recast throughout, now that America rejoices in a past which has all been painstakingly rewritten with more care of the King's English, and wherein the War of the Revolution takes its proper place as the latest addition to the list of German outrages. Our newspapers continue the war-time economizing of intelligence, and still serve patriotic substitutes in serials, wherein Red and Yellow and Black perils keep colorful the outlook, and fiends oppose broad-minded seraphim in every political matter, and Messrs. Lenine and Trotsky emulate the

apostle by dying daily. Our clergy are no less prolific in their more futuristic school of art, and on every Sabbath morning discourse engagingly of paradise and of that millennium of which the advent is somehow being brought nearer, one gathers, by the more energetic of our prelates taking notes and whisky in the larger restaurants. The past, the present and the future are thus everywhere presented in the terms of generally pleasure-giving prose fictions: and life is rendered passable by our believing in those which are most to our especial liking.

Well, it is the task of the novelist—I mean, at last, the novelist who is frankly listed as such in Who's Who—to aid according to his abilities in this old world-wide effort, so to delude mankind that nobody from birth to death need ever really bother about his, upon the whole, unpromising situation in the flesh. It is the sole aim of the novelist, alike in art and com-

merce, to divert us from unprofitable and rational worrying, to head yet one more desperate sally from that ordered living and the selves of which we are tired.

So I suspect there must always be, to the last digit, precisely as many "methods" as there are novelists. For the business of the novelist is to tell untruths that will be diverting: and of their divertingness he can have no touchstone, before the receipt of royalty statements, save only the response which these untruths evoke from him. His primary endeavor must, for this reason, be to divert, not any possible reader, but himself.

Some tale-tellers find themselves most readily bedrugged by yearning toward loveliness unknown and unattainable: these are, we say, our romanticists. To them are, technically, opposed the Pollyannas among fiction writers, who can derive a sort of obscure esthetic comfort from considering persons even less pleasantly sit-

uated than themselves—somewhat as a cabin passenger on a sinking ship might consider the poor devils in the steerage—and so write "realism." But the inspiring principle remains unchanged: you think of that which is above or below you in order to avoid thinking of what is about you. So it really does not greatly matter whether you travel with Marco Polo to Cathay or with the Kennicotts to Gopher Prairie. The excursion may be for the purpose of looking at beautiful things wistfully or at ugly things contemptuously: the point is that it is an excursion from the place where you regard over-familiar things with a yawn.

When one considers these truisms—and fails to see why anybody not in the act of writing for the more successful periodicals need dispute them—the form and scope of even the formally labeled novel seem fluctuating and indeterminable. The novelist, it is apparent, will write in the form—with such dramatic, epic or lyric lean-

ings as his taste dictates—which he personally finds alluring: his rhythms will be such as caress his personal pair of ears: and the scope of his writing will be settled solely by what he personally does or does not find interesting. For the serious prose craftsman will write primarily to divert himself—with a part thrifty but in the main a philanthropic underthought of handing on, at a fair price, the playthings and the games which he contrives, for the diversion of those with a like taste in anodynes. And to do this will content him. For he will believe that he may win to fame by brewing oblivion, he will hope to invent, if he be very lucky, some quite new form of "let's pretend." But he will not believe that anybody with a valid claim to be considered a postgraduate child can gravely talk about affixing limits to the form and scope of that especial pastime.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND FICTION

by

FLOYD DELL

IV

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND FICTION

It seems to me that fiction, in whatever stage of development, still retains the purpose of the fairy-tale. But the fairy-tale, contrary to what many people suppose, has a very serious purpose. We come into the world equipped with a capacity of varied emotional response to our environment. That environment, even in its simplest terms, the home and family, presents itself to our childish intelligence as a mysterious chaos of facts; and the greater world outside this little world seems, as we come in contact with it, more chaotic and mysterious still. In the task of growing up, it is necessary for our emotional responses to this chaotic world to be coordinated; we must deal with this huge world quite as if we understood what

it was really like. So that from the first a process of education goes on which undertakes to tell us—not so much what the world is really like, for that would only be to make confusion worse confounded—but a notion of it which will arrange our impulses toward it into some kind of order. What is required—for we have as children a wealth of emotions and little experience—is an *emotionally intelligible* interpretation of the world. The most preposterous fairy-tale, if it is a good fairy-tale—if it is in any sense a work of art, and arranges the emotions with which it so fantastically deals into some kind of rhythmic pattern—tells us more about friendship, love, ambition, folly and heroism, and their significance to ourselves,—than we knew before. So that it is, essentially, a kind of simple pragmatic truth that is aimed at in the fairy-tale. We can not learn life by living it—we must have some kind of notion about it to enable us to digest

our experiences as we get them. And of all kinds of teachings, that which comes to us through our emotional perceptions is the most fundamental, precisely because it is the most effective.

But the pragmatic truth of these simple works of art is different from plain factual truth, and in a sense an opposite of it, in so far as factual truth remains, for all our efforts to understand and arrange it, chaotic. Underneath all the picturesque disorder of the fairy-tale, there are the outlines of a very simple and orderly world.

And the same, I think, is true of the adult novel. Our experience has by this time been enlarged, so that we delight in a picture of life, let us say, in terms of jobs, wages, politics, and erotic misadventures, rather than in one in terms of quests, treasures, talking bushes and dragons. But underneath these recognizable incidents of our chaotic daily lives there must be the outlines of a simple and orderly

world—a world more simple and orderly than the unfathomable nature of life's mysteries—but emotionally we require the satisfaction which only simple certainties can bring. For we still, as adults, read novels for the same unconscious and serious purpose with which we read fairy-tales as children. We want to know more about our relation to the world. But we emphatically do not want the raw material of life; we want life made emotionally intelligible—and that can only be effected by a process of simplification and arrangement which a hostile observer, indifferent to these purposes, might call suppression, or censorship, or lying.

Even so, the fable serves the purpose which the mere facts fail to serve. I have read in my life only one book which was, in my opinion, measurably true to the more common facts which constitute ordinary life. That book—and I recommend it to the curious reader as a perfect illustration of the

difference between artistic truth and truth to facts—is *One Man,* by Robert Steele. Since I have mentioned it, I suppose I should add that its truth to the facts of ordinary life does not consist in the specific nature of the crimes, misdemeanors and follies there related—but rather in the irrelevance to each other of the emotional states which it records. There are in this book episodes—dozens of them—which would have served Dostoievsky for a climax. But, as here presented, they have no emotional validity whatever, because they have no relation to what comes before and after. Judged as a work of art, the book is preposterous and trivial. Its sole significance is as a document showing what human life, before it has been subjected to the processes of art, is like. Ordinary people are not so "bad" as the hero of this book; but they are, I think, quite as absurd and contradictory. The true-to-facts story of any one I know would make a document

equally inchoate and meaningless with this, if perhaps a little less sensational. And it is because human life in the raw is like this, that human beings need and desire those simplifications, those interpretations, which by suppressing, altering, rearranging the facts, permit what is left to have some emotional meaning.

No one, I think, who has any very acute sense of the variety and jumbled irrelevance of the facts of life as they present themselves to us in ordinary human experience would either imagine that the literal record of these facts constituted a story, or be so ambitious as to attempt to frame them *all* into an intelligible emotional sequence. Yet this—either or both—is what the writers of "realistic" fiction are currently and disapprovingly said to be doing by many American critics. There is supposed to be a "school" of writers whose theory of fiction is to put down everything "just as it happens in real life." There are gloomy

forebodings of the death of the art of fiction under the assaults of the "literal chroniclers of life." These fears are quite unnecessary, and the lovers of romance can take heart. Not Theodore Dreiser in his most zealous realistic mood ever undertook to set down more than the limited and particular selection of facts which he deemed necessary to convey the quality of his emotion.

There is, I think, no quarrel between romance and realism. The selection of facts is more rigorous and more conventional in romantic fiction, more generous and more adventurous in realistic fiction. I can not even assert, as a writer of fiction that has been very flatteringly called realistic, that realism aims more ardently than romance at truth. It does seem to me to have the merit, whatever that may count for, of being more intimately recognizable as a vehicle of truth by those whose experiences afford them the opportunity of testing

in their own minds the literalness of the accounts by which that truth is sought to be conveyed. The literal truthfulness of Sinclair Lewis's account of a day-coach in the Middle West may not imply an imaginative insight into the souls of its passengers; but there is no doubt that it puts many of us into a receptive frame of mind toward emotional conclusions about middle-western souls which we might otherwise be disposed to reject as too painful. The function of literalness in factual detail would seem, in fiction, to be much the same as it is in the court-room—to make it harder to escape the obligation of feeling "unpleasant" emotions. The author's motive is plain: he has these emotions, and he wishes to lessen the burden of them by sharing them with others. And the reason why realism is so often of this "unpleasant" character, is simply that happy emotions need no such elaborate reinforcement. We do not need to have it proved that the hero

and heroine lived happily ever after; the assertion suffices. It is when they did not live happily ever after that many painful—and intimately recognizable—details are needed to persuade us to believe that so it happened. But if we read these realistic accounts of our human misadventures, it is not because the manner of the telling has a virtue of its own, but because we desire to enlarge our conception of our lives so as to bring these difficult and painful facts also to some emotionally intelligible relationship with the rest of our experience.

And if any of the new kinds of scientific knowledge, such for example as psycho-analysis, are to be of use to the novelist, it must be, I think, not by virtue of any magic of "truth" which they contain, and certainly not by bringing new facts within the scope of the novelist's interest, but rather because they may possibly simplify his task of selection and arrangement—

because they give him certain conceptions of life as emotionally intelligible and possibly as fundamentally appealing as the oldest fairy-tale.

THE MAJOR ISSUE

by

WALDO FRANK

V

THE MAJOR ISSUE

To the incidental character of the novel as a reflection of life we give great care; to its essential nature as a contribution to life we bring ignorance and neglect.

How would we regard the critic who judged El Greco, Rembrandt, the African woodcarver by their conformance with a set of rules of anatomy and geometry text-books? Would we not say: the artist who creates by means of physical forms needs knowledge of physical laws, knowledge of physical structure. For it is of these materials that he articulates his vision and his form. But he is an artist insofar as he has a vision and a form. His knowledge of muscles, torsos, limbs, of spatial quantities is his knowledge of *means.* If we wish to know en-

dogenously about muscles, torsos, limbs, we do not go to the artist . . . although we may go to men who have learned vastly from artists. And if we wish to understand intelligently the particular use which the particular artist makes of such matters, we must learn first what the artist wants to say and determine by that measure if he has used them well.

The novelist's need of individual and social psychology is a pretty good analogue to the plastic artist's need of physical forms; the novelist's use of customs, manners, institutions, creeds, is kin to the plastic artist's use of the ways of mass and space. How comes it then that we think we have struck to the heart of the nature and reason of a novel when we discuss its psychological correctness, (its verisimilitude with our own idea of certain men and women) or its awareness of certain social problems?

Of course, there is reason for this, but it is not as some of us doubtless would be pleased to have it, that this

is a "scientific age." "Even in our fiction," to quote the imaginary professor, "we look for serious discussion of fact and of truth." To whom I make reply: "In your fiction, you look for corroborating statements of your own particular brands of fact and truth—brands put up from previous creative contributions: which is quite another matter." It is not scientific nor conducive to the advantage of science, to judge a novel in terms let us say of its "psychological accuracy" or of its "faithful reflection of social reality." For to do this is to accept as an Absolute Measure of accuracy and faithfulness the rationalized data of previous creators or groups of creators; and thereby to hinder the continuity of man's contribution to reality of experience which is, from the scientific standpoint, part of the function of creative art. Here as elsewhere the gap between science and art is truly the gap between false science and bad art. To be scientific about art is to be esthetic about it.

Nor is it necessary to go back to Aristotle. Enough, as regards that very great man's Esthetic, to say that his meaning in the phrase "Imitation of nature" was determined by a positive and common animistic understanding of nature which included primarily the dynamic principle of the individual will and which most of us moderns lack: and that it was limited by an ignorance of the processes of the human Psyche which was excusable in Aristotle but is less excusable in Mr. Babbitt. . . .

Let us skip to the nineteenth century. German Romanticism and French Romanticism, by respective metaphysical and esthetic methods, brought new sentient worlds to the use of the evolving will of Europe. The hierarchic stuffs so satisfactory to Shakespeare, Montaigne, Racine, no longer served the creator. So Romanticism ordered *Receptivity to Material.* All fields, all worlds, all "realities" . . . from the innermost ego to the farther-

most sea . . . became the stuff of expression. Despite the complexity of this and the intricate relation of the artist and the group, one can say directly enough that to the novelist this meant a simple thing: here once more was adequate material whereby he could express himself. The creator was as ever active and dynamic. The material, at least in the ultimate process toward art, was fuel, symbol, means—anything but end. Now, after the creative act, came the Program. Balzac assured us that he was Secretary to Society. Flaubert vowed that from his works the least personal taint had been excised. Zola and the Goncourt brothers discoursed on Darwin whom they never understood and framed the Naturalist novel which they never wrote. For Balzac was the opposite of social secretary: he was the creator of dense organic forms to the making of which he kneaded the "life" of France as the baker kneads flour. Flaubert, as weak an analyst

as ever gained fame for being a great one, was a pure and powerful intuitif: he was a true progenitor of imagism and of cubism: he made of Emma Bovary, Salammbô, Saint Anthony and Frédéric Moreau successive expressionistic forms of his own uncomfortable state in France. Only the disciples of Zola, whose names we forget, wrote Naturalist novels according to the program. And the trouble with them lay not with a program good or bad: it lay with their own lack of creative power.

Now, during the propaganda periods of Romanticism, when *receptivity to fresh material* was a point to be fought for, the terms realist and naturalist as indicating acceptance of the romantic attitude had meaning. The fresh material of the romanticist became the reality of the realist. The realists, later the naturalists, were they who espoused and practised the romanticist esthetic. Correctly, therefore, realist and romanticist were

one: and during the romanticist period alone did the word realism, applied to the novel, have sense as a defining term. Moreover, in those rare cases where the romanticist will for new-worlds-to-conquer begot the finality of a new-conquered-world (a true work of art), the romanticist-realist ended in classicism. His work was classic. The whole lot of opponent terms equated into zero.

Never are these terms with their old connotations heard today in France and Germany where they were born. They are still with us, where they are merely borrowed. Outside of this technical and relative meaning about which most of us are as ignorant as we are of the esthetic school of Egypt, realism as referred to art and the novel is as senseless a term as has ever been picked up from a junkshop. Every artist that has lived in the world is a realist insofar as himself is real and as his material, determined by himself and the world, must be real

also. But no artist conceivable to man can be a realist in the sense of our critical implication—the sense of an absolute reality which true scientists would not arrogate to mathematics and certainly not to man. "It is the highest glory of man," said Remy de Gourmont, "that there is no science of man." Our standard of reality is an accumulating, gyrating and disappearing flux of subjective contributions. If there is a science of man, its name is esthetics, and its axiom: that each new contribution shall be gauged by the inner law of its own genesis. And here is an axiom that does away with ninety-nine one-hundredths of our "intelligent comment" on novels that create characters and discuss conditions "true to life."

What happens to us is simple. Receptivity to material was a *means* for the creation of the nineteenth century Epic—an Epic which I am convinced is still in the pre-Homeric stage. That

receptivity we have made into an *End.* The Continental Europeans are indefatigable program-makers. They made a program of the liberating process of the nineteenth century novel. We use that program like pedantic children to measure our own works and give them meaning: with the result that we rob them of what meaning they have. Meantime in Europe, they have twentieth century novels—and twentieth century programs whereby to gauge them.

Program-making is a vital part of the process whereby the social body more or less assimilates those new experiences and forms of life which are literature and art. But program-making must start from a recognition of the extra-intellectual nature of creation. The intellect does not create, it measures and brings up what it apprehends. The value of imaginative literature, even pragmatically as *nourishment to life,* lies in the fact that it creates what the intellect—theory,

program, a priori standards of good, bad, right and wrong—does not as yet possess. For the intellect possesses what was created *before*. Hence contemporary art can never fall within the scope of pre-existing programs. And to judge the novel—its value as a contribution to literature and life—on the basis of any given psychological or documentary measure of fact, truth, reality and the like, is irrelevant and absurd.

This formulated problem of scope and theory concerns the novelist only indirectly; only insofar as he is affected by the critic who, rationalizing his work on the basis of the work itself or on the basis of some forebear's work, either aids or clogs the process of assimilating the novelist's contribution to the sum of social experience. Let the novelist think that he is primarily concerned with socialism, housing problems, psycho-analysis and the like. If he is an artist, his thinking will be but a detail of his

work; and if he is not an artist his work will be but a negligible detail of his thinking. "From the beginning to the end," wrote Cervantes, "Don Quixote is an attack on the romances of chivalry." With this mouse of a program he produced his mountain of an epic, because he was a mountain—a veritable sea and mountain—of a man. The esthetic value of any novel is the end-product of its related elements of life. The novelist who deals with, and relates into organic form, elements of life, with whatever intellectual conviction, may create Beauty if he has that virtue in him. But the novelist who tries to deal directly with Beauty, get at it directly, short-cutting the elements of life, is doomed. The artist in the act of creation can afford to be anything rather than an esthete.

But the critic and the public—let them look to their ways! Let them cease from studying a means as the end. Let them cease from parroting

decayed programs. Let them not think that they have dealt with a novel . . . however much they praise it . . . when they have discussed its "psychology" and its "documentary material." (The term "psychological novel" has less meaning than the term "physiological oil-painting.")

We have a few true creators, capturers of organic form—which is another term for life—from the hinterlands at which mankind rekindles its fires and forges its tomorrows. And we have the perennial Mass—passive, indolent, like a woman fond of reflections, hostile to all *contributions,* since they mean renewal, effort, change. Which will the American critic serve: the dross of the Mass which is the Mass itself, or the spirit of the Mass which is the artist?

THE NOVEL OF TOMORROW

by

ZONA GALE

VI

THE NOVEL OF TOMORROW

ALREADY we have mosaics of beauty in the American novel. But it lacks organic beauty.

In the modern novels of England the high example of organic beauty seems to be the work of Hudson. No one knows what he does; but his touch unseals an essence.

In the American novel we have nothing approaching this essence. One is grateful, in these days of the triumphant discovery of the commonplace, for mere beautiful mosaics. But these have little to do with the basic beauty, the organic beauty which a novel must breathe before it can approximate its potential scope and function.

Now organic beauty in any art must be compact of beauty not already familiar to us. Familiar beauty can

give us the mosaics. But it is strangeness in beauty which alone can weave the spell and bear the perfume. This is not to say unreality; but on the contrary a deeper reality than we are accustomed to divine. The reality of literal levels of perception to which we do not ordinarily penetrate or of which, rather, we are not often conscious as they penetrate our own plane. Professor Eucken's claim that the spiritual world is "an independent reality, waiting to be apprehended, waiting to be incorporated into our universe" is enormously served by art whose functioning is so largely in extensions of the ordinary faculties. Between the naturalistic novel, which is a record, and the romantic novel, which is the product of human imagining, lies this other novel, the novel of tomorrow, concerned with imminent yet almost undivined reality of human conduct, human dream, perceived "for their own sakes, with the eyes of disinterested love."

Our failure may lie in the fact that such beauty as our novels have is chiefly concerned with moral idealism and romantic love, as we know them now. Our moral idealism is still intent on the esoteric with—shall we say?—either simple standards which ought long ago to have been taken for granted or conventionalized standards having no correspondence with the mystery of conduct. Therefore our novels devote themselves to, say, one emerging from a crude upbringing to the point of being hounded by her "furies" to escape tawdriness. Or even with those records of Henry James, that—Conrad calls him—that "historian of the individual conscience, of adventure in which only choice souls are involved"—crucial instances, always suffused with a certain beauty, but always the beauty of the individual conscience in known areas. Moral beauty rather than esoteric beauty. And as for the treatment in novels of romantic love, that is al-

ways a matter of bright feathers, of the *pas de seul* before the cave door, our only advance from that cave door courting being that there are antiphonal feathers and dancing instead of masculine antics alone. In spite of the fact that there is, both in idealism and in love, something not ourselves which is the glory of the experience, still the novel continues to treat only of measurable reactions, rarely calling down the utter sunlit areas where every human soul does sometime enter. Now these sunlit areas are a part of life, of reality. If they can be experienced, they can be incarnated in the novel. And it is these sunlit spaces of discernible reality which alone can give to the novel a basis of beauty.

Moreover these reaches are not merely extensions of moral idealism or of romantic love. Neither the one nor the other may be of dominating concern there, save in some form so heightened that it has passed into

pure beauty. Nor are these areas remote; it is their power that they interpenetrate the homeliest lives and the most ordinary surroundings. This is a point which the worshipper of mosaics of beauty will not readily admit and perhaps he is right about his mosaics. But organic beauty is everywhere at home.

The function of the novel is not to treat of life as it appears to the ordinary eye; or even to treat life in its ordinary aspect if that were ascertainable. It is not even to treat of life as it should be, if *that* were ascertainable. Its function is not primarily to report the familiar at all. The function of the novel is to reflect the familiar as permeated by the unfamiliar; to reflect the unknown in its daily office of permeating the known.

Thus the novelist is to go not only "joying in his visible universe" but in that universe by which his own is interpenetrated. That universe invisible save as music or color or the word

or some other high manifestation causes it to flower in human experience.

It is this high manifestation of the word which Hudson makes. He causes unfamiliar verities to enter our ken as verities. For the poetic mind, the mind then of the novelist at his best, is the perceiver of the real curve of life, the knower of something at least of its inner ecstasy.

. . . How shall this interpretation best be made? This accomplishment concerns the form of the novel.

However extreme has been the modern novel in stressing the commonplace, it has developed a form suitable for the expression of reality. Any reality, commonplace or not. This form is direct, unreflective, highly selective. It is in immediate contact with its material. It is uncompromising, tactless, unashamed. And its style is as bare and clear as a plain.

It may be that the whole flair for the commonplace will be found to

have contributed chiefly to the formation of a new purity of form. The treatment of the commonplace calls for stark precision and the novel has learned something of stark precision through treating the commonplace. If the novel had continued to treat of "the good, the true and the beautiful" it might be, with the redundance of that phrase itself, laboring on in a fringed and silken fashion, tasseled, plumed, melancholy.

When the novel can take that form —that naked and lovely instrument— and that stark style, and cause them to function in the expression of nameless beauty, such as Hudson summons, it will have sounded the new note, the note of the novel of tomorrow. And this will be a note of romanticism, but not of romanticism as we have ever known it.

Ten years ago a wise man said: Free verse is all well enough. It is now a vehicle for many who otherwise would have no vehicle. But wait until the poets begin to use it. *Then!*

So it is of the terse, the staccato, the compact, the shorn form and style of the modern American novel. Heighten its compactness, take from it certain affectations such as deliberate sordidness, saturate it with all that divination can capture of communicable beauty. *"Then!"*

To use his divination to clarify the interpenetrating beauty of common life and to draw down still other beauty; not to manufacture it from unreality but to discern it in Reality and to reflect it; and then to pour this beauty through the clear crystal of a form as honest as a milk bottle—there lies the novelist's lovely, his imperative task.

But this he will never do if he is working with his mind alone. Only when he knows that his divination of beauty, of all life is "an independent growth which he himself tends and watches" will be incarnate in the novel the vast and lovely proportion of the days.

THE PROFESSION OF NOVELIST

by

JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

VII

THE PROFESSION OF NOVELIST

In view of the many generalizations now circulating about literature in the United States, it might be interesting, or even instructive, to examine the specific case of a relatively young man with a published novel of authentic value. It is necessary, for this purpose, to limit the investigation to a beginning writer, in fact, to a first novel. Its purpose will be to discover exactly the conditions which here await a fresh and actual literature.

It is, almost invariably, characteristic of a novelist of value that he should not, initially, be situated in a material ease. Young men with money, and post-graduate honors, do not commonly turn to the novel, but to criticism and poetry. Young men who make their bow in the better known magazines hardly ever write

novels—worth a thought at all. Those who do, surprisingly, write good books produce them in hours taken from widely other necessary tasks; or in times of sickness and forced idleness. Such an individual, pouring into his pages everything, elsewhere suppressed, that he integrally is, finally has a manuscript put together and typewritten with an infinite pains and an immeasurable difficulty; it is posted or carried to a publisher; and, after a space of something like six weeks, he has a—for him—stupendous letter of acceptance.

This novel, which we are understanding as thoroughly worth doing, will, of course, be different from the flood of readily marketable fictions; it will probably be tragic, or, at the least, satirical, in spirit; and there is a chance that the manner of its writing will, too, have aspects of originality. The result of all this will be that the publisher, almost tearful over his unselfish nobility, will call the writ-

er's attention to the fact that his book, while it may accomplish a critical success, can have little or no sale.

The inevitable deduction will be reflected in the rate of the royalty: the most honest payment possible will be five per cent. on the first two thousand copies, with two and a half per cent. more after that, and, perhaps, a future increase to ten per cent. This novel, submitted toward the end of September—novels are apt to be written through the open months—will be accepted about November first. By that time the publisher's spring list must be pretty well in hand—with the present manufacturing conditions a number of the spring books will be already, mechanically, under way—and the novel we are considering set for publication next fall.

It will, then, appear a year after it was submitted; and, in the general mode of the publishing business, a royalty report will be returned three months later. The report will be for-

warded in three months, and the half yearly payment made in six. This novel, then, let us say, was actually begun late in the winter of nineteen hundred and nineteen and, finished, it was submitted—this is very rapid—in the fall of that year. It was published in the autumn of nineteen twenty, and the first sum of money obtained from it sometime in the April or May of nineteen hundred and twenty-one, or two years after the putting of a pen to paper.

This novel, if it is individual and vigorously fine—unless it happens to be carried on the wave of a chance popular cause—must be, as a material property, a failure. If, for instance, two thousand copies are sold, the publisher will about get his money back; and, if its retail price is two dollars, after two years the writer will receive two hundred dollars. If four thousand are sold, the publisher, thinking himself well out of it, will make a little, and the writer will have the sum of five hundred dollars.

During that period, you see, while he may, perhaps, write two other novels, he can have none published. A second will, if he is fortunate, be in preparation for appearance not sooner than six months after the first came out . . .that is the best he can hope for.

Meanwhile, he is at the necessary employment of finding a living for himself and, perhaps, two or three others. The temperament of a novelist, his dream of peace, leads him quickly to marriage. If he is able he will, first, support himself by contributions to magazines of generous payments. Superficially, that has an appearance of contributing to his main desire, the writing of novels; but, in reality, it is not only tragically far from that but actually destructive to his ability as a novelist. It would be closer to his occupation if he labored in the pit of a steel mill; for there, at least, he would come in contact with the material of his aim.

He might be, again, he often is, em-

ployed in writing for newspapers, on special or general assignments, or even in a moderate editorial capacity. But that, while it is a better preparation for the novel than that offered by the public taste in short stories, breaks his power of concentration upon the longer ventures. There is hardly a novelist with a training in newspaper offices whose style is not sharp and brittle; it is, through habit, focussed on incidentals rather than on the whole. And of the other multitudinous occupations by the means of which beginning novelists manage to keep themselves alive nothing in detail need be said.

My own experience, attended by some unusually fortunate circumstances, in the main followed this course. *The Lay Anthony*—to refer to it only in the terms of its reviews—was, as a first book, quite generously noticed. I was to get a five per cent. royalty after a preliminary thousand copies were sold—then, in, I think,

nineteen hundred and fourteen, a sale of a thousand would repay the publisher—and . . . some nine hundred were bought. I do not remember the terms of the contract for *Mountain Blood,* brought out a year afterward; but I recall very sharply that it did not pay me a penny then. I sold three papers of a type I liked to a magazine the reverse of popular, and got from them, in a diminishing scale, fifteen, twelve and a half and ten dollars.

That brought me well into nineteen sixteen, but—where my novels were concerned—nowhere near a material solvency. The fortunate circumstances alluded to, in connection with myself, were a comfortable place to live, an unconquerable laxness in whatever I failed to like or only half liked, and George Horace Lorimer. But all that, necessary as an explanatory note to my comments, is a digression.

The point is that, in the United States, the western world, of the pres-

ent, the profession of a novelist simply does not exist. The novel, different from the lyrical measures of poetry or the compactness of essays and critical papers, requires a long time for its composition; it needs close thought and reasoning, yes, and peace, quiet; and such conditions, today, are expensive. The good young novel is the product of passion and resentment and a bitterness at injustice—qualities missed by the rich—or it is made of a dream of loveliness desirable in its shining remoteness from the immediate scene.

Things like those, beautiful and far away, or close and tragic, people, the public, do not like and will not pay for. The spectacle of suffering, so purifying to the individual, the mass neither will nor can support. And—but perhaps it is only my conviction—fine novels can be constructed from one of two sources, either they present the heroic or cowardly individual opposed to hopeless odds and death; or

they have to do with that which was beautiful and is lost. There is, I feel, nothing else worth an inattentive curse.

The novel, itself a modern affair, is a necessary victim of modern circumstances: men no longer have any leisure, any quiet, any interruption of the waste of their beings. Individuals, individual minds, are disappearing in the confusion following the humanitarian welter of the nineteenth century. Any art is, in essence, aristocratic, proud, free from the cheapness of the mob; and now the mob, like a turbid and dead sea, is over all the land.

There is, in the scheme of the present, no need, no general need, for truthful or delicate novels. Those that are, hopefully, produced, have a short or a long life in a very limited sphere. A number of fine novels, when the truth or a delicacy of vision is never for a sentence departed from, will, after a succession of books and

years, undoubtedly afford a dignified, but hardly plentiful, living. With them, as well, a reputation for integrity, for honesty and courage, will grow and fix itself in men's minds; and that is a great and a happy accomplishment.

That, however, lies in the distant future; the present is devastating; and there isn't, in the United States, even the small pension that fell to Mr. Conrad. What, specially, makes this condition sad is the fact that its grimness is accompanied by the most heartening proclamations and pretensions. The whole American world, it is made to appear, is waiting impatiently with laurels and gold for distinguished native creative writers. It is a situation that would be resembled by accompanying a dark secretive play with the loud music of a *Follies* Review.

A cast clamor of hypocrisy, of self-laudation, has always resounded about the arts of music and literature; the titles of admirable novels are,

seemingly, on all sentient lips; the titles are, yes and even rude ideas of the plans of writing; a few actual volumes are prominent upon library tables . . . but that is as far as it goes. The novels themselves, like the defrauded relatives of prosperous and comfortable families, are not wanted around. It isn't pleasant for the snugly-minded, where they are sensitive at all, to be in the company of Sherwood Anderson. There is really no reason why they should have him unsettling their luxurious somnolence; in such a case I shouldn't put up with him for a second. I'd dismiss *The Triumph of the Egg* with a vague satisfactory remark about the need to suppress these propertyless agitators. Ship 'em to Rooshia, I would advise. Or else I'd make it clear that no such books could have a place in my family.

That is unanswerable, it Is, and no argument or effort can overthrow it. However, I might wish for a better world—and, luckily, it is not on my

sheet to struggle for improvements—with the earth as it is I can not conscientiously blame its attitude toward men who are, in essence, its bitterest critics. To put down "love those that revile you" is nothing more than a vain display of ink.

Literature, as an art, as a service of beauty, has little or no place in the modern state of society; and it is just possible that it will never be of importance again. Maybe, forever, it is all over, only a lingering and cherished memory of something fantastic in the hearts of a dwindling few. There is—to my mind, pessimistic in cast—no evidence of even an infinitely delayed improvement in humanity; it is no more than the alternate fading and glow of a charcoal fire, a core of heat, blown on intermittently by a bellows. When the leathers of the bellows wear out, when the gases of the charcoal are exhausted, there will be a minute fleck, a dead drifting atom, of ash.

Yet, against all calamity—and I have said this so often that I must seem to be falling into the repetitious habit of old age—only beauty, woven in fragile materials or in hard metal and stone, is more durable than time. A fragmentary poem will be deathless, an arrangement of the spirit in prose will last, as our time runs, forever; but that will keep no body, and very little hope, warm.

THE NEW NOVEL

by

ROBERT HERRICK

VIII

THE NEW NOVEL

What is the new novel to be? In retrospect from another generation this phenomenon may not seem, after all, so different from its forerunners as contemporary self-consciousness would like us to believe. Time has a leveling way with all human accomplishments, even those done in the pure ether of art, and the surviving landmarks often seem to have little relation with the intervening valleys, however noisily these were once inhabited. The increasing preoccupation with the novel in our days and its voluminous and multifarious production may be due less to a renewed or undiscovered vitality in the form itself than to a growing realization of its adaptability to the needs of a crowded and self-conscious civilization. For it is beyond dispute that the

novel has taken its place with the cinema and the newspaper in the vast cultural and interpretative effort of our world. That it is discovering within its flexible form new possibilities for the exploitation of new fields promises little for its present or future performance. It is the easiest and simplest weapon of self-revelation for a democratic society (however difficult and toilsome the complete mastery of its art is) and in its deepest essence must remain always autobiographical, and hence universally alluring. . . .

During the late century the novel oscillated outwardly between the rival camps of Realism and Romance. The long, inconclusive battle of the critics which somewhat languidly animated the intellectual life of the late nineteenth century was largely concerned with the defence and the attack of these two metaphysical unrealities, and it was not until the century mark was safely rounded that we began to real-

ize that the prolonged battle about realism and romance, like all vehement conflicts, had been waged in a fog of misunderstanding for an impractical victory. Neither side of the controversy had an exclusive possession of the truth, for neither ideal existed except in the partisan imagination of the theorist, and the sturdier practitioners of the art dodged back and forth between the embattled camps—as they always have done and always will do. For realism and romance represent, verbally, nothing more than two persistent moods of humanity, under which it surveys itself and the universe intermittently, not mutually exclusive, and together not completely occupying the ample territory of the human spirit. Consistent realism can be found only in the work of inferior and unimaginative artists, because they are more easily satisfied with surfaces, and a world of surfaces is the nearest approach to the absolute in a subjective universe. Conversely

it may be said that consistent romance easily becomes nonsense, and human beings striving on the whole for the use of their intelligence quickly surfeit with undiluted romance. That is what happened exactly at the end of the last century when, in this country especially, a new and uneducated reading public avid for simple imaginative excitement boosted the sales of flimsy romantic novels to unheard of figures, then overnight rejected its passion.

With the snuffing out of this unsubstantial romance, the way was cleared for better things (not that the cream-puff "line" of romance has wholly disappeared or ever will lack favor in a world so largely composed of naïve people, but the flavors have been changed, and the more earnest craftsmen no longer supply the market for this kind of goods). The younger and more serious minded writers having given over the concoction of saccharine toys for the popular taste, ignor-

ing the tiresome debates of the critics, went out for fresh adventure, and here it was that for nearly a generation England led the way. There began a period of interesting experimentation, which pushed the novel into untried fields and carried it for good and all beyond that futile controversy of realism and romance. Novelists forgot their old preoccupations, as to what could and could not be done in fiction, what the public would and would not "stand for." They have found that the scope of the novel can be indefinitely stretched to include new matters and new methods and that the reading public will take—that is some part of it will take —whatever gives promise of novelty or a fresh perception of the old. Even dullness! For the ancient truth that the dull and the commonplace belong properly to life and can even be endured in literature when intelligently presented has also been rediscovered. Under the exhilarating leadership of

Mr. Wells the new English novel assumed much of the kaleidoscopic variety of the newspaper and tried to teach the reader to think, at least to consider many hitherto unfamiliar subjects. It also acquired, at many hands, a new frankness about human sexuality, or perhaps merely lost a puritan reticence of expression on private matters which had been temporarily imposed upon it by public manners. Finally it began a search of the Freudean caves for fresh motives and new thrills. Incidentally it had acquired from the glib interpretation of those opulent years just before the war, many of the European tricks of craftsmanship that had heretofore been concealed from the Anglo-Saxon by the veil of a foreign language. In short the novelist's art had become, like morals, thoroughly eclectic and individual, choosing its methods and its materials where it found anything to its purpose, often whimsically. With this surprising wealth of plun-

der both in matter and form, it remains to be said in all honesty that this period had no great master of the prose epic,—no Tolstoy, no Zola, no Hardy—nor even a Meredith, and the master ironist of the period was a Frenchman and his effulgence was that of a splendid and lingering withdrawal.

Thus, then, to the period set for all things by the war. Since the war the novel, at least the more vivid interest in its possibilities, has come to this side of the Atlantic. For although experimentation still goes on in England, more especially among the younger women novelists, the triumph of arresting accomplishment seems for the moment quite departed. And in this country, though there is anything but a pause, one feels the anticipatory bustle of the approaching accouchement rather than the happy certainty of an actual delivery. Only the hard pressed newspaper critic and that indefatigable enthusiast who

composes the eulogies on "jackets" any longer believe in THE American novel. Nevertheless we await with more than usual eagerness those American novels which will fully justify the present wide interest in the art of fiction. America is undoubtedly waiting to be "done"—adequately, and a considerable number of excellent experiments attest the fact that the writers are either already here or will shortly appear, who will do the big fields descriptively, analytically and synthetically with all the up-to-date technique (including Freud) and with something better than "promise." They will find, indeed, that much exploratory work has already been accomplished unobtrusively by their elders, though most may seem to demand redoing, as it should in every generation. And they will also find (which their elders did not) that the subject is in a serious mood, willing, nay anxious to be "done." The American public is now ready and able to

take an objectively cool and interested attitude toward the reactions which it creates in the artist and his resultant picture. That will be immensely helpful to the worker, for in this delicate undertaking there must always be a close cooperation between the artist and the sitter. America is ready—or nearly ready—for a reappraisement and a restatement of herself. . . .

Although this seems to speak encouragingly for an interesting and valid accomplishment before the younger American novelists, freed and equipped as I have tried to suggest in the foregoing paragraphs by the progress of the art through the last generation, yet it by no means prophesies confidently the coming at once of great novels or great novelists. For these depend, I take it, upon certain elements which in our ordinary discussions we are only too apt to ignore. One is upon the spiritual depth of the soil to be worked. If *Main Street* is to date a fair report upon the intelligence

and the emotional depth of these United States, by and large (which I believe it is), then even the greatest craftsman will have to wait for his full harvest. One does not make enduring brick from that straw! But in the tremulous gropings of our fast changing time he may not have to wait long. . . . As for the great novelist himself, it is well to remember that craftsmanship, method and manner and material too, are but the superficies of a great art. The inner, and the incalculable factor is the quality of the individual spirit—the soul (if I may be permitted to lapse into the vocabulary of my ancestors). Even with the novel I think we should be more interested in that, more concerned with that, than we are with the matter of the tools employed. We shall never be content with simply having our work "done," no matter how faithfully, nor how dexterously the artists wield their tools. What we are waiting for is a new world to be

revealed to us out of the disguise of the familiar and the worn through the spirit of some one who sees deeper and farther and more understandingly than we do, into whose vision we can resign ourselves confidently, as the religious convert resigns himself upon the bosom of authority and there finds the desired relief and freedom. Frankly I do not see upon the horizon of my today any evidence of such a comprehending creator, fit to reveal the new secrets of this tumultuous scene, and to impose his own authoritative, indubitable sense of its life. (Now that the great Anatole, alas, is gathering the last threads of his long and finely woven skein!) When that larger personality arrives it will make little difference what his method may be or his material or where he starts, whether in Gopher Prairie or New York, because he will steadily and surely respin the whole of our universe from whatever accidental fragments he may happen upon, and will

consistently people it out of the secret stores of his own life.

For we must not forget that men and women, however much at times they may seem to ignore or even repudiate the fact, are more interested in the inner truth buried somewhere within their souls, than with all the outer adjustments and mechanics of their lives—and the two are only incidentally related.

A NOTE ON THE NOVEL

by

HARVEY O'HIGGINS

IX

A NOTE ON THE NOVEL

The writing of a novel is always a collaboration—like the production of any other work of imaginative art. One of the collaborators is chiefly concerned with form; he takes the material offered him by his partner, chooses among it, arranges it, makes his pattern with it. The other collaborator is largely responsible for scope, but he affects form by the quality and abundance of the material he offers and by the strength of his desire to have it used. These two collaborators have had many names in the history of art. They are now fashionably known as the conscious mind and the subconscious. They have been much studied by the psychologists of late; the terms of their collaboration, in life as in art, are becoming more or less known; and that knowledge is impor-

tant in any consideration of the form and scope of the novel.

The conscious mind has been described as a sort of hand that has developed out of the subconscious in order the better to grasp and manipulate reality. As a hand, it is always busy trying to arrange in some sort of comprehensible picture the chaos and muddle of facts around us. It is always making patterns—patterns of cause and effect, patterns of natural law or moral law, patterns of beauty, patterns of sequence and theme and recognizable purpose. Into art, it puts design and symmetry and balance and symphony and all those other qualities that make the disorder of actuality less bewildering to look upon. It continually leaves outside of its pattern great numbers of facts which it can not fit into its immediate arrangement—and uses these subsequently in other patterns. And, under the name of criticism, it studies its past patterns and deduces what it

calls the laws of art from these performances and tries to make all future performances conform to those laws.

But the subconscious mind—the dream mind—seems to have little respect for reality and less for pattern. It furnishes its material to intelligence under impulses of its own. It is the primitive animal mind, emotional, instinctive and sympathetically intuitive. It merely dreams dreams, making for itself pictures that express instinctive desires, and apparently getting relief for instinctive tensions in mere hallucinations of relief. And the psychic origin and impulse behind these hallucinations is the need of the human ego to get its way against reality, to dominate reality in imagination when it can not dominate in fact.

For these reasons, it seems to me that there can be no final form in any art and no set limit to its scope. The form of the novel will continue to change as intellect devises new patterns to include new dreams from the

subconscious; and these dreams will alter and enlarge the scope of the novel as the human ego enlarges its experience of the reality which it is trying to dominate. The difference between the romantic novel and the realistic will be a difference in the manner of this domination—the realist attempting to subdue reality by understanding it and the romanticist to defeat reality by escaping from it. The humorous fictionist will seek to raise himself above reality by laughing at it. The crusading novelist will make war on reality and try to overcome it with reforms.

The most popular American novel in the past has been the romantic, because the great need of the American psyche has been to escape the pressure of reality. American humor has long supported us in a feeling of superiority to reality by helping us to laugh at it. Now the crusading novel is becoming popular in its appeal to us to change a reality which we have

neither escaped nor laughed out of existence. It remains for us to produce an artist—and a public to support him—who shall seek to dominate reality by knowing it and understanding it and accepting it as it is. The future form and scope of the American novel will probably be in his hands.

A BRACE OF DEFINITIONS AND A SHORT CODE

by

HENRY KITCHELL WEBSTER

X

A BRACE OF DEFINITIONS AND A SHORT CODE

THERE is a wholesome catholicity about the definition of the novel in *The Concise Oxford:* "fictitious prose narrative of sufficient length to fill one or more volumes, portraying characters and actions representative of real life in continuous plot." The two components in this definition give it a width of angle inclusive of two easily distinguishable sorts of work. One of these relies upon the contrivance of its pattern for maintaining the reader's concern, the performers being more or less rigidly conventionalized types. The other appeals to this same concern through the authenticity of its characters and their experiences. In the currency of the day, it is the latter sort, the novel of character—the portrait rather than the decoration,

which gets itself spoken of as "the novel" or "the serious novel."

I am aware that I have taken controversial ground in making a classification from the reader's point of view, for many of my younger colleagues will hardly admit that the reader exists, let alone postulate him as a relevant factor in the affair. In the light of the brilliant performances of some of these younger and newer novelists, one does well to think twice before taking issue with them upon an abstraction of this sort; but I have thought twice and more than twice, and to me the thing is fundamental.

It seems to me that no act of creation, whether parthenogenetic or otherwise, is real unless it gives a valid objectivity to the created thing; sets it up by itself, on its own feet, and leaves it to walk alone, live its own life, weather its own storms. An act which doesn't result in the projection and detachment of an objective entity of some sort isn't a creative act at all

but a mere self-satisfying gesture. The only objective existence a novel can have is through its readers, and, therefore, it is from the point of view of its readers that it must be judged. It must be judged by itself, without reference to its creator; it must have articulation enough in its own bones to enable it to stand alone, and vitality enough between its own covers to keep it alive.

That's plain enough, I think, so far, but it leaves the novelist in a difficulty; confronts him, anyhow, with a demand for a rather fine distinction. Does this objective theory of the novel imply a contact between the novelist and his reader? I believe it does, but I hasten to qualify this admission by saying that the only reader whose approbation the novelist has any concern with is himself. But himself as reader not as author. He must write what he likes, but he must make what he writes intelligible to a stranger whose likes and feelings and associations are similar to his own.

Writing thus, for his alter ego, he gives himself, of course, dead away, and his courage in giving himself dead away is the measure of his seriousness. If he writes up to a superior reader or down to an inferior reader, he is equally a snob and the truth is not in him.

I'd like, with the wedge of another definition, to split once more the half log we have left. There are still two sorts of novel a man may write, determined not so much by the selection of his character material as by his attitude toward that material. He may select unfamiliar types and make their unfamiliarity the attractive thing about them. He relies, if he does this, upon what a city editor would call the news value of his characters. He accents their distinctive speech, etiquette, point of view. If he does it plausibly, he gives his readers a sense, not always illusory either, of being increased in worldly wisdom, of becoming cosmopolites. At least they are

personally conducted tourists, and, if the conductor knows his business, they have a wonderful time. They go back-stage; they visit western ranches, middle-western small towns, Hollywood, the Latin Quarter, India; they learn the distinctive slang of the chorus girl, the cowboy, the hick, the British subaltern and his Mrs. Hauxbee.

It is possible, even in dealing with this unfamiliar material, to put the stress on the other foot, accenting and revealing not the surface strangeness of these aliens but their underlying common humanity. "Folks," Sinclair Lewis says very earnestly, "are folks. The hobo, the itinerant tailor and the hick, just as much as the college professor, the business man and the society woman." And conversely, of course—though I never have heard Mr. Lewis say this—the college professor, the business man and the society woman as much as the hobo, the tailor and the hick. So this question

asks itself; why, if common humanity is a novelist's concern, should he go afield to look for it?

The critical fashion of the day proscribes the exceptional. Unless the novelist wishes to rest under the imputation of romanticizing, let him write about commonplace people, dull inarticulate earthbound people, and let him courageously make them as dull and inarticulate and earthbound as the majority of mankind admittedly are. Let their deeds be stillborn and their conversation mere ungrammatical adumbrations of their unrecognized desires.

Is it heresy to ask whether this sort of thing is not tourist fiction just as the cowboy and chorus girl stuff is tourist fiction? Of course, nobody is a cowboy to himself, nor a chorus girl. Is any one a dull earthbound clod? Is the brave young radical who writes about earthbound clods, emphasizing their dull inexpressiveness—is he, to himself, dull and inarticulate and

earthbound? He is not. He is an exceptional person. He is so exceptional that dullness fascinates him. He is so expressive that inarticulateness has a news value for him.

My professional code boils down to about this:

The novelist should give his work form and structure enough to make it intelligible to others than himself. He should write at his own level, neither up nor down. He should not flinch from giving himself away. He should rate at higher value the experience which, in the natural course of things, comes his way than that experience which he has gone looking for. He should not overrate the importance of ideas. He should not despise his characters. He should try to make every word and act of his characters concretely true, and let universality alone, for nothing ever was universal that began by trying to be.

SPLITTING FICTION THREE WAYS

by

William Allen White

XI

SPLITTING FICTION THREE WAYS

Any attempt to place the novel inside of definitions, setting its meets and bounds, brings us up sharply against the insistent question asked of old and never answered, "What is art?" And for himself, and his cosmos, one man's guess at the answer is as good as another's, probably rather better. For every man has his own scheme of creation. Every man is set down alone under the stars and on the more or less solid earth, to build out of his conscious experience the fabric of the dream in which he walks. If he sets down some account of his dream, some definition of his universe in terms of love or fear or hate or joy or any emotional medium in which his conviction comes to him about life, what he makes, for him is art. But it is of necessity not art for any one else.

It may be an obscure picture on the sand, drawn with a shell or stick. It may be a Poem of Ecstasy or it may be a cathedral or a large fat Mrs. Rubens in oil, or a patent Madame X. leisurely waiting for the laundry wagon to bring her first aid in the matter of clothes! Whatever it may be, to some man the thing means a conviction about the meaning of life. To its creator, if to no other soul on earth, the thing created in joy or pain or fear or love or whatever rise of pulse beat, means art. Others, of course, need not accept it as art; being in ribald spirits they may laugh at it, or otherwise, being mean and supercilious they may try to suppress and censor the man's expression, which may seem to others ugly or indecent, or stupid or wicked beyond tears. But whether they censor it in laughter or in rage, they must not forget that for the man who made it the thing was art. He has a right to issue his challenge to the world and stand or fall by it.

So any man's novel has its rights. Its rights are limited. We don't have to read it, thank Heavens! We don't have to approve it, having read it. We have the royal privilege of declaring that the author is a fool; that no such world as he has tried to depict ever did or could or should exist; which being translated only means that the novelist does not see our world. But, as fellow travelers in a number of different universes, and varying stages of cosmic environment, we have no right as potential artists to deny him the right to print and peddle the poor thing that is his own.

Now, here we come to the doctrine of a democratic theory in criticism. And we must come to it when we admit a variety of different worlds surrounding the consciousness of human beings. Now, this democratic theory of criticism like all democratic theories and doctrines is based upon a principle of tolerance, of mutual respect, of neighborly kinship in the cos-

mos. And if we follow a democratic theory of criticism art must not develop a snobbery, in its lower levels, in, say, the level of criticism. To set up rigid standards, to make inexorable rules, to apply static tests, to accept or reject any man's account of the world in which he lives as false and foolish is dangerous. Also democratically it is unfair. A number of critics affect to giggle at the novels of Mr. Harold Bell Wright. Their fathers sniffed at Bertha M. Clay. To some of us Mr. Wright does seem to walk among chromos as one who lives in a vast forest of Sunday supplements. And there are those who feel that Mr. Theodore Dreiser's world is afflicted with misanthropy and worms. As between a world of "Simply to Thy Cross I Cling" done in gaudy colors and a world painted from the mud of a pig pen many an average man or woman shrinks from choice. It is not a question of art. There is no more art in *Sister Carrie*

for instance than in *Pollyanna.* It is largely a question of the world in which the authors move, of the philosophy of life which inspires the writer. And *Sister Carrie* may well be as false as *Pollyanna* in its philosophy. Life is doubtless highly carrieful—to coin a word—for Mr. Dreiser, and for Mrs. Porter it is surely pollyanceous; but for a lot of us it is neither. We trek along on the middle plane out of the heights where Pollyanna walks in trailing clouds of glory, and above the depths where Sister Carrie sloshes in the mud and muck. Possibly these middle averages toddle about with Alice Adams.

So let us for the sake of illustration say that broadly there abide these three views of modern American life personified by these three estimable young women, Sister Carrie, Pollyanna and Alice Adams. They personify rather distinctive groups in our novel reading public. Possibly the groups represent stratifications in the

matter of view-point of life found in our book buying public. Why has not each crowd the right to its own opinion, and why should the exponents of either group stick up their noses at the others? If it pleases the Freeman as the exponent of soured and pickled brains and heart and genital intestines to purvey that kind of wares—say literary tripes and caviar—well and good. The soured soul market is a trifle slow; but it is steady and seems to be growing. Then why try to stimulate it by affecting that those who deal in spiritual marshmallows under the Wright or Porter brand are ignorant venders of adulterated goods? And why insist that those who make and sell common cooking food—say *Roast Beef Medium,* for example—are base vulgarians. There is no particular virtue either of craftsmanship, in the making, or in the salesmanship in the selling as between those who handle gamy tripe, or marshmallows, or baker's bread. And the snobbery

of the tripe makers is as unjustifiable as the unction of King's Daughters at the marshmallow counter. And as for the disdain of the prune and potato peddler, the workers in the other two departments of spiritual refreshment, it is positively wicked; if the tripe department will permit the use even in rhetoric of a word implying the existence of right and wrong.

Why can we not have a democracy in our art, and let posterity hang on whatever rewards, prizes or premiums it may choose? The novel is only one form of that outward evanescent expression of our emotions which pass for art. Music, poetry, painting, sculpture, architecture, possibly the despised movies, the drama and home making all are reflecting the things that are passing in our hearts. And we have many hearts, and are making "many inventions." For the most part they are fleeting shadows, whether upon the silver screen or in bronze or stone and steel.

They pass as we pass. Why quarrel over the forms into which we cast our heart's desire? Why waste our time setting up a fleeting aristocracy in our art? Why make broad our critical phylacteries, why enlarge the borders of our literary garment? Why the Dial?

We can cry ourselves black in the face to catch the ear of posterity; but posterity will make its own judgments about us. For that matter is it highly important that posterity shall know us? Other generations have passed without leaving a mark in the sand. Why should we care which mark identifies us, whether Harold Bell Wright's or Booth Tarkington's or Sherwood Anderson's? Neither tells all about us. Each tells much. And the degree of truth in each man's story would seem hardly worth wrangling about a hundred years hence. The difference between *Winesburg, Ohio* and *The Shepherd of the Hills,* or between either and *The Bent Twig*

or *A Hazard of New Fortunes* may not be so important to the reader of the next century as it may seem to the reader today. And all the hundreds of thousands of copies of *The Shepherd* printed and sold would avail it less if possible in the next century than all the critical claque for *Winesburg, Ohio.* The two or three decades of immortality of *The Hazard* and *The Twig* will not help them in that great day of judgment.

It is all vanity of vanities and vexation of spirit, this price making for posterity, this attempt to say what is good and what bad with the miserable rules and standards which we are setting up today. The novel is for the day, as the newspaper or the skyscraper or the park monument is. It finds its market in spite of our rules of art. Each novel circulates upon its own level. Its public knows it instinctively. Those seeking marshmallow novels never buy tripe or caviar, nor prunes. And the closed shop among

the clerks and artisans in the literary candy trade, in the fictional packing house, or in the grocery store of novel making, does not stimulate more or better produce, nor wider and more intelligent marketing. The Phariseeism of the workers in the craft merely makes the consumer smile. He buys what he wants, follows his philosophy, chases his mood, or scents the desirable fodder of the moment. The novel he buys tells him what he wishes to know; and something more. Good or bad it fills him with the spiritual pabulum that he needs. At the moment of his purchase he would reject the kinds found in other books. And gradually as he gets a bellyful, he goes upward and onward, or downward and outward in his tastes and desires, until if he keeps on reading for a lifetime he knows about all that our novels have to tell him—all kinds of them. Then reading has made him a full man. That is the best hope we can have for him. To that end the

woodsman, the millman, the paper dealer, the printer, the binder, the bookseller, and the writer are working. And in the business "all service ranks the same with God!"

"DREAMING TRUE"

by

EDITH FRANKLIN WYATT

XII

"DREAMING TRUE"

1

From time to time dialogues between enterprising reporters and authors visiting this country gladden the pages of the daily press. Among these I remember reading some years ago an opinion on novels which has always interested me.

The reporter mentioned to the visiting author a novel presenting a brilliant delineation of a newspaper-writer who becomes a drug-fiend.

"The book is greatly over-rated," the visiting author replied. "Why this newspaper-writer—the hero—is only a second-rate man! I should not care to ask him to my home to lunch."

Think of the "noted names of fiction" who could not survive this simple test. Consider the imaginary figures that you can not picture as en-

joying lunch with your relatives, and with whom your relatives could not enjoy lunching. "I should not care to ask him (her) to my home to lunch." Goneril—or Regan either—Bill Sikes, Gilbert Osmond, Medea, Werther, Bradley Headstone, any of the people in *Wuthering Heights*—

Without indulging myself further in regarding this or other aspects of this quick test of the value of fiction I will hasten to say that the chief reason why it seems so dismal an absurdity is perhaps because it could only serve to cut off the visiting author from the most profoundly entertaining experience fiction offers. This is, for me at least, the experience of "dreaming true," the experience of being some one else, of being a hundred, a thousand other people.

2

This interest in becoming somebody else has never seemed to me to arise from seeking novels as an "escape"

from real life or from one's own life, One enjoys the power of identification with the million-peopled cosmos of novels not for the negative reason of seeking an escape but because the exercise of this power is a positive pleasure in itself, comparable to the pleasure of looking at well-composed colors, or of hearing sound beautifully ordered.

If one can not ask every one to lunch, if one can not meet, converse with, live with, identify oneself with every kind of human life in the pages of a novel, then there is no place in the world where one can ask every one to lunch, meet every one, converse with, live with, identify oneself with every form of human life.

This is in my belief the chief distinctive contribution that the art of the novel makes to the life of the mind. In the other arts of letters the reader is more or less a listener, and part of the audience. In the art of the novel he is a participant.

Yet, besides this there are of course many elements of existence—too many to mention—which are the peculiar province of the novel; many kinds of truth that no other form of letters is so well fitted to express.

A way of life over a long space of time; the change of community opinion; the contrast of social groups; the several aspects of one man's or woman's nature; a correction of vision and gradual revelation; the development of human resources; above all the free and fecund power of life, its variety, its improvisational force in virtue of which one situation grows out of another in many-colored, creative continuance—these are some of the many truths that the novel tells best.

After he had been left by his thin-hearted wife, Lavretzky in Turgenev's *Liza* returns to live on and manage his father's estate:

There under the window climbs the large-leaved burdock from the thick grass. . . . Farther away in the fields

shines the rye, and the oats are already in ear, and every leaf or tree, every blade of grass on its stalk stretches out to its fullest extent. "On a woman's love my best years have been wasted," Lavretzky proceeded to think. "Well, then, let the dullness here sober me and calm me down; let it educate me into being able to work like others without hurrying." And he again betook himself to listening to the silence without expecting anything, and yet, at the same time, as if expecting something. The stillness embraced him on all sides; the sun went down quietly in a calm, blue sky. . . . In other parts of the world at that very moment life was seething noisily bestirring itself. Here was the same life flowed silently along, like water over meadow-grass. It was late in the evening before Lavretzky could tear himself away from the contemplation of this life so quietly welling forth—so tranquilly flowing past. Sorrow for the past melted in his mind as the snow melts in spring; but strange to say, never had the love of home exercised so strong or so profound an influence upon him.

This has for me the singular magic of the novel's faculty for quietly well-

ing forth, the profound charm of a work in which each part of the tale develops and enhances what has gone before, and is the moving prelude of what is to come.

Many instances occur to one of the genius of novelists in employing the unique opportunity the form affords for spacious original design. One thinks of the magnificent river-journey at the close of *Tono-Bungay* where one rides and rides past the high-piled tokens of changing civilization out and out to the open sea from which one looks back with emotion at the lives of George and of Edward Ponderevo as seen from afar now, through a veil of reflection on the greater ways of mortal dream and and destiny.

One thinks of the tremendous scene of the wild populace at the guillotining at Auxerre in *The Old Wives' Tale,* as contrasted with the staid persons and streets of the Five Towns whence Sophia Baines has come to stand at

her hotel-window and look forth in disgust and fascination.

One thinks of the wide, bright tide of world-letters and word-criticism bearing Wilhelm Meister through his *Lehr-und Wanderjahre;* and of Daudet's *Sappho* with the painter Corot touched in among the guests at that brilliant ball in one of the opening chapters. Vista, panorama, multitude, spontaneous succession—all these the novel tells us supremely.

3

The changing world of novels is full of surprises. One will have thought that, in general, literary fashions are rather unrewarding and tend to cheap standardizations of material. Then suddenly a literary fashion will be productive of admirable results. Or perhaps it would be more precise to say that often some new theme chances to be excellently expressed at about the same time by many novelists.

Thus the past season has been especially rich in the criticism of husbands and fathers. Inspired exposures have occurred on all sides—the exposure of Herbert Dwight Deacon, the exposure of Mr. Weemys in *Vera* and the exposure of Mr. Waddington. Among these Herbert Dwight Deacon is the most liberally treated by the author. This is to the good, as liberality is seriously needed by the male characters of fiction where they are too often disfranchised and appear purely in a vicarious relation as sons, fathers, husbands or lovers.

This vicarious discriminatory manner of regarding men in fiction is especially noticeable in the character of Tito Melema. Seen solely from the standpoint of his exceedingly feeble abilities as a lover, Tito, though physical beauty is almost too richly lavished upon him by his creator, has never the slightest chance as a human being. Always in a miserable subordinate state as a mere adjunct of Ro-

mola he is never for an instant permitted to come forward except on the depressing grounds of love and beauty and as a sort of male houri. His position is far more discouraging than that of Nora in *A Doll's House*. And one need only compare Ninian Deacon's treatment as a bigamist by his creator to Tito's treatment as a bigamist by his creator to appreciate the increase of enfranchisement for males in fiction.

Perhaps it is because of the recent overshadowing appreciation of *Miss Lulu Bett* that one has not heard much of an extremely beautiful and original novel of Miss Zona Gale's entitled *Birth*.

It is the story of a "superfluous man" in a Wisconsin town, the story of a whole town of men and women, a place most individually perceived. Yet its outline has some of the national angles of the town that imprisoned Thoreau, and where Stephen Crane saw the tragedy of *The Monster*.

Years flow by and the changes of years. Death is here and love and pain, all touched with swift ironic humor. Each soul is imagined by this humor, and in the wisdom of truth intimate and profound. The neighbors walk past in the evening—the wise, the silly, the generous, the small. The band plays. The trains thunder overland. And you walk in sun and rain where

Burage numbers her trees by thousands. In the morning the sun comes in strong gold, lavished upon the grass, save where the leaves lay their bright veils. All the narrow green strips outside the walks turn bright.

In rain the town, like any other, lying folded in a visible medium, becomes an enclosure cut off from something. Rooms become more intimate. Something ceases, and something is present instead.

You walk under the thousand-numbered trees over the November pavements. The possibilities of your fast-flying life hurry past you unrealized;

and at their passage you despair and laugh at yourself and hope again. Your heart burns at the mean injustice of existence, its petty cruelty and hardness to those who are forgotten upon earth. Sometimes I have thought every splendid novel is about justice and injustice. This novel has the presence of genius. When you read it something ceases; and something is present instead.

It has the power of social imagination, the light which beyond any other illumines the art of the novel; and makes us hope ever to dream more truly of all the mortal fortunes in our world.

THE END